

Why Do Persons with Mental Disorders Continue Working in Kyodoren "Social Workplaces"?

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Background

In a capitalist society, persons with a mental disorder are effectively excluded from the labor market, and many such persons are forced into non-employment or into a welfare workplace with low wages as a user supported by staff members. (Saito 2010)

In contrast to this, Kyodoren has envisioned a "social workplace" where disabled persons and persons without disabilities work together on an equal footing, basically eliminating disparities in working conditions such as wages. While the number of such facilities is small, operations are developing with differences in each location. (Yonezawa 2014)

Purpose

This study clarifies how Kyodoren social workplaces are established based on the philosophy of "equal equality" in which there are no people without disabilities serving as occupational instructors and wages and other working conditions are the same and why persons with a mental disorder continue working in such places.

Method

Field location | A social workplace (established in 2010, toilet cleaning, open all year round, working hours from 9:00 to 16:00, 21 days per month, monthly salary of 107,000 yen).

Members | 17 persons in their 20s ~ 60s who have physical, intellectual, or mental disabilities (including 4 persons released from prison) + 1 elderly person with no disabilities.

Research methods | Participation observation at work sites, interviews with workers, and interviews with four persons with a mental disorder (April-August 2019)

Participants

	Years of work	Age	Gender	Disability type	Disability pension	General employment	Welfare employment
A	1 year	30s	male	Bipolar disorder	—	○	—
B	7 years	40s	male	Schizophrenia	2nd grade	—	○
C	12 years	50s	female	Schizophrenia	—	○	—
D	3 years	50s	female	Schizophrenia	2nd grade	○	○

Results

1. How the social workplace operates

2. Why persons with mental disorders continue working there

Wages

1-1. Wages distributed equally

- Some persons complain that those who are slow or unable to work properly receive the same wages, but it is possible to live on a wage of ¥100,000 plus a pension of ¥65,000 (total of ¥160,000) per month, so although there may be complaints, they are not at a level serious enough to quit if one is paid a stable wage.
- The philosophy of "a place where everyone works equally" is printed on the uniform, so I have given up [complaining].

2-1. Financial reasons

- (In comparison with general companies) 100,000 yen is low, but it is 10 times higher (compared to 10,000 yen at a workshop), so it is better to work while complaining rather than quit and be unemployed. (Mr. B)
- When working in general employment, there is a fear of "relapsing" and returning to non-employment. (Mr. A)
- Persons with disabilities are compensated by public benefits. (Mr. A, Mr. B)
- Even in the same social workplace, if the subsidy system differs a wage of 100,000 yen will not be paid (some offices also pay tens of thousands of yen). (Mr. A)

Workplace environment

1-2. Working on an equal footing

- There are no staff members without disabilities to instruct disabled persons, but this is dealt with by having several persons with physical, mental, and mild intellectual disabilities who can understand what is happening on site and determine what to do being assigned to each team.
- Because there is no supervision, autonomy increases.
- Some persons struggle to read, write, and speak, but persons in the team who are capable of completing daily team reports and completing check sheets for each site do so.
- It is possible to focus on smartphone game applications during breaks, so a reasonable distance between employees can be maintained without any friction/awkwardness.
- There are no welfare specialists who can be consulted on site, but it is better not to have them. (interviews are not always effective).

2-2. Psychological reasons

- No staff members to provide guidance or management (as is the case in a workshop). There is a high degree of freedom without being instructed. (Mr. B)
- One is not told hurtful things and does not feel depressed, and there are no situations of being unable to think straight due to busyness (as is the case in an ordinary company). (Mr. A)
- Because one is left alone to a moderate degree, there is a sense of working with ease, so persons who were previously shut-ins continue working without quitting. (Mr. B, Mrs.C)
- Although there are unsatisfactory cases such as people who do mischief and get in the way of work, people who do not work, etc., nothing will change by thinking about them, so I do not dwell on them. (Because it is a system that does not cut, does not divide, and allows working together) (Mrs.C)
- There is no person who has the role of providing mental care, but when there are worries, co-workers (friends) listen. (Mrs.D)

2-3. Social reasons

- Voices of appreciation from toilet users who are citizens. (Mrs.C)
- It is a job that allows people to interact directly with society, meet people, expand their world, experience freedom, and take pride. (Mr. B)
- I think I can experience the role of being a bridge between people without disabilities and people with disabilities (Mr. A)

Conclusion

It was revealed that as persons with mental disorders / physical disabilities / mild intellectual disabilities are divided and assigned to each team, the teams manage to get the job done while having persons with mental disorders present and the operation of the workplace is established by persons with different types and degrees of disabilities helping one another. This can be described peer support beyond disability type.

It was revealed that even if there is dissatisfaction with respect to wages and relationships, persons with a mental disorder continue working in social workplaces because of ① financial reasons (107,000 yen is distributed uniformly by wage compensation through public benefits), ② psychological reasons (there are no staff or supervisors who provide instruction or management at the work site, human relationships in the workplace environment are not difficult, and when there are worries, co-workers (friends) listen), and ③ social reasons (a job that allows people to interact directly with society and that is socially approved).

Additionally, it was also revealed that because it is a system that does not cut, does not divide, and allows working together, those involved in it do not dwell on their complaints because they know there is nothing to be done about them.